

## Is the Single Tax Practical?

By HENRY A. C. HELLYER. *The author of this interesting little story of a practical application of the Single Tax principle is a Geogist of many years standing. He is a Consulting Engineer, specializing in lumber-yard planning. He is a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers, the Chief Engineer of the Tenafly Lumber & Supply Company, and Engineering Adviser of the Northeastern Lumbermen's Association, Rochester, N. Y. His home is in Tenafly, N. J.*

\* IT IS OFTEN SAID that the Single Tax may be all right in theory, but it won't work in practice. I can refute this argument out of my own personal experience.

Shortly before the first World War I was appointed Boro Engineer in the Boro of Bergenfield, N. J., and continued to serve in that capacity for a period of eight years. In that time the Boro experienced a rapid growth, increasing from a small village of 800 to a town having a population of 5,000. This rapid growth was accompanied by the usual speculation in land. Farms were bought up in various outlying parts of the Boro and subdivided into small lots. Streets were laid out—on paper—and often named on the numerical principle, with the result that we had no less than four "First" Streets in the same Boro. A few small houses would be built in these outlying sections, beyond the reach of the "Utilities," a wasteful procedure, but part of our present system.

From time to time letters would be received and read at Council meetings, from residents of these houses, asking that something be done about extending the water mains to reach their locality. Usually the Mayor would refer these letters to a committee of two councilmen for investigation and report. Councilman Smith and Councilman Jones would interview the Water Company, who would send an engineer to look over the ground. He would measure the distance the main would have to be extended and compute the cost. It might be, say, \$2,000. If the people interested would guarantee a revenue from that extension of 12% of the cost, or \$240 a year, the work would be done. The petitioners of course were unable to underwrite any such guarantee, and the matter would be dropped.

This had happened a number of times, always with the same result, when one evening a letter was read from certain residents of Merritt Ave., in the Northeast corner of the Boro, and the Mayor (possibly in a fit of absent-mindedness) said, "Referred to the Boro Engineer." Being a Geogist, I saw at once where the difficulty lay. If we could work out some plan whereby *all* of the people benefited could be made to contribute their share, instead of expecting only a few at the end

of the line to stand the whole expense, the problem would be solved.

Instead of interviewing the Water Company I made up a plan showing the watermain extension which I submitted at the next Council meeting with the suggestion that the Boro proceed to do the work as a "local improvement," just as if it were a sidewalk, and assess the cost on the property benefited. This was quite a new idea to the Mayor and Council, but they could see nothing wrong with it. I was directed to prepare a plan and ordinance to be introduced at a later date, at which time a public hearing would be held, as required by law.

It was, of course, necessary at this point to discuss details with the Water Company, so the Boro Attorney and myself were delegated to meet their attorney and engineer, to go over the plan. At this meeting they, too, were surprised at the novelty of the idea, but could find no fault with it. After some discussion it was agreed that as soon as anyone on the line was connected up, the cost of his assessment would be refunded to him in full by the company, and further, that at the end of ten years, all assessments would be refunded, whether the lot owners were using water or not. On consulting a realtor I found that a 50-foot lot on a street having water would be worth \$150 more than a similar lot on a street without city water. The cost of the main would be about \$2 per foot, which would figure out \$50 for a 50-foot lot, plus \$10 to cover legal and other expenses. Thus it appeared we were increasing the value of a lot \$150 at an expense of only \$60, and in the end even that \$60 would be returned.

At the public hearing there were no objectors, and the ordinance was passed. The next procedure was to advertise for bids. The Water Company itself was the lowest bidder, and the contract was awarded to it. This was natural. Its bid was probably about actual cost. As the company would have to pay in the end, there was no object in adding a contractor's profit.

In advocating the adoption of the Single Tax principle it is generally assumed that some people will be hurt while others will be benefited, and it is justified on the principle of "The greatest good to the greatest number," but it will be seen that in the instance related above, *all* concerned were benefited and not a single person hurt. Is this not "practical"!

A poster at the entrance of a Quaker Meeting House in Burlington, N. J., reads:

REMOVE THE CAUSE OF WAR  
Provide access for all nations to the  
World's Resources and Markets.  
Will you pay this  
Price for Peace?